

**Hazards  
Campaign**



[www.workstress.net](http://www.workstress.net)

The UK National Work-Stress Network

Spring 2005

## Stress illness tops sickness list

Depression and anxiety are now the most common reasons for people starting to claim long-term sickness benefits amounting to £13 billion a year, researchers from Kings College, London have said. They have overtaken musculo-skeletal conditions such as back pain, which used to prompt most such claims, the team told the British Medical Journal.

The Department of Work and Pensions suggests about 35% of people claiming Incapacity Benefit in 2002 had mental or behaviour disorders, compared to 22% with musculo-skeletal conditions. An estimated 176 million working days were lost in 2003 because of mental illness, up 10 million on the previous year.

The King's researchers say there are too few occupational therapists in the UK - just one specialist for every 43,000 workers.

"If the government is serious about tackling the consequences of common mental disorders then innovative policies... will be required" the researchers add. "This would be a wise investment given the substantial economic and social costs engendered by the current service framework."

A spokesman for the Depression Alliance said employers were often not equipped to recognise the warning signs of stress and mild depression in workers. Employers need support to understand the situation and their responsibilities.

Kate Groucutt, a Policy Adviser with the CBI, said: "Nearly two thirds of employers have formal rehabilitation arrangements to assist employees returning to work, including flexible working, counselling, medical treatment and training courses. And over three-quarters of employers also have arrangements to help employees suffering from stress, including job reorganisation and access to occupational health services, which could help prevent more serious problems."

### Make a date!

#### Stress Network 6<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference

Saturday 19<sup>th</sup> November 2005

Hillscourt Conference Centre, Rednal, Birmingham

**"Ensuring a Work-Life Balance"**

Speakers, Workshops  
Accommodation Available

More information on [www.workstress.net](http://www.workstress.net) soon

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## Convenor's Report

A recent telephone call from a lady who is the key manager of a voluntary organisation, confirmed that stress is a significant factor in

many workplaces, and especially the voluntary sector.

When she said that despite complaints to her board (their response was *'tough luck – just get on with the work'*) I was sad to note that another set of employers was ignoring their duty of care to a vital employee. She, having steadfastly refused to take her GP advice, is now signed off sick for the foreseeable future; and yet she is still worried about her work, the impact of her absence on her colleagues, and the continued possible failure of the majority of the board to be sympathetic to her cause.

A call from the desperate wife of a manager-husband whose company is claiming their needs out-stretch those of their employees, again confirmed a lack of understanding on the part of many employers. They seem unaware of their common law duty of care, the need for implementation of risk assessments and the application of the HSE Management Standards.

These cases are good examples of why the Management Standards alone are failing to meet the demands of some 75% or more of respondents to the initial HSE Consultation exercise some 6 or more years ago for REGULATION, ACoP and ENFORCEMENT. Until we achieve proper application of the law, then employers will do as they please, ignoring their responsibility for the psychological, physiological damage they cause, including the premature deaths (often by suicide) amongst their workforce.

*Sensible LIFE-WORK* Balance is essential for all. We will focus on this employer duty of care for all workers, in our forthcoming Conference on November 19<sup>th</sup> this year. Note the date in your diary – please check our website for details, and above all, book your place and bring along a colleague.

We look forward to seeing you in November.

**Ian Draper (Convenor)**

## What are employers doing?

### The case *against*: 1

BRITAIN'S companies have been urged to scrutinise the way they treat their staff, after a new report found that 75 per cent of employees are suffering from stress. And the report, from Aon Consulting, warns that the situation is getting worse, with firms not doing enough to prevent workplace stress.

A third of the 1500 people polled blamed the demands of their jobs for stress, while one in five complained about lack of management support.

Ben Thornton, a researcher at Aon Consulting, said: "A certain amount of stress is actually necessary in order to achieve high performance, but after a certain point stress stops being necessary and becomes a problem. "The development of good managerial practices throughout the organisation can yield cash dividends in the form of reduced time off, lower costs for recruitment and initial training, and a healthier workforce overall."

### Bosses 'Ignoring Workers' Stress'

### The case *against*: 2

Employers are unprepared and unwilling to address the problem of workplace stress, according to a new survey by Human Resources magazine. It says 56% of businesses do not have a specific strategy in place for managing stress among their staff. Meanwhile, 48% of these do not offer employees access to counselling or information on where to find help, it claims.

The financial impact of stress on the workplace is extremely high - in 2004 alone it cost UK businesses around £3.7bn, according to the magazine.

Unions have been calling for some time for more action from firms to tackle the problem. They say many companies underestimate the stress caused by pressure at work, often made worse by long hours. Surveys have found that UK employees work the longest of any in the EU countries.

## Is this the case *for* business? (Sorry! This is New Zealand not the UK)

Nearly half of the businesses in a survey have introduced stress-busting projects such as free counselling and subsidised gym memberships in the past year.

The survey of 100 businesses conducted by Working Well, a division of the Mental Health Foundation, found that 64 per cent of organisations were "doing well" at managing stress and fatigue, 23 per cent were doing a satisfactory job and 13 per cent were doing poorly.

Schemes to deal with workplace stress were introduced by 47 per cent of businesses last year. Stress management training programmes were in place at 43 per cent of businesses.

The survey would be used as a benchmark, said Working Well manager Leanne Luxford. She said the snapshot "looks really positive", particularly in terms of recent employer projects.

Many employers had introduced schemes since the amendment of Occupational Safety and Health legislation in May last year.

The amendment explicitly cited stress and fatigue as workplace hazards to be managed by employers.



## Is this the way to do it?

My wife teaches in one of our lovely state schools. She also has an aging grandmother who has been described by the doctors as not being expected to live much longer. Having had several days off ill with some of the many illnesses the children like to bring to school with them she was told by her head-teacher that she would not be allowed a day off to attend her grandmothers funeral unless she died during the school holidays.  
Anon, Avon

Story from BBC NEWS

## Diary Dates

- **May 12<sup>th</sup>** Leeds University, Hazards Campaign Meeting
- **July 30<sup>th</sup>** Weekend Hazards Conference, Leeds University and the link address for booking form on the Manchester Hazards site. I sent it to SG members recently.
- **May 7<sup>th</sup>** Next UKWSN SG meeting also **Sept 12<sup>th</sup>**
- **Sat 19<sup>th</sup> November 6<sup>th</sup>** Stress Network Conference

## Workers Put Their Hearts on the Line

*"Stress is being linked to rises in cardiovascular risks worldwide. But researchers have trouble quantifying the problem."*

Extracts from an article by Nancy Cleeland  
Times Staff Writer (March 21, 2005)

The longer hours, faster pace and insecurity typical of many new jobs is taking a toll on workers' hearts, according to a growing body of occupational health research.

Studies in Europe, Japan and the United States have linked increases in cardiovascular risks and disease to a global push for greater productivity. Researchers say the damage is cumulative and will become more apparent and costly over time.

"I think we're dramatically underestimating the impacts of these changes," said Peter Schnall, an epidemiologist who directs the UCLA Center for Occupational and Environmental Health. "There are enormous health effects, but they don't make it into the calculations."

The latest research in the field, presented this month at an international forum in Newport Beach, hints at the potential scale of the problem.

U.S. and Japanese workers who put in more than 50 hours a week had markedly higher rates of hypertension, a precursor to heart disease. In Belgium, stressful jobs defined as highly demanding with little decision-making authority appeared to elevate the blood pressure of workers even as they slept.

China's embrace of rapid economic change has been accompanied by surges in cardiovascular disease that have overwhelmed urban hospitals. And in one small Norwegian town two years ago, the mere rumour of a plant closure was enough to raise overall blood pressure for months.

### Defining Stress

The link being made between shifting corporate employment practices and heart disease reflects a larger interest in the health effects of stress, which began showing up in occupational health journals in the early 1990s. In 1996, the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health part of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention named the changing nature of work a priority for study, seeking to catch up with European counterparts.

But nearly a decade later, after continuing painful shifts in global work arrangements, the answers remain frustratingly vague. "Clearly something is going on," said Steven Souter, who coordinates research on work stress for NIOSH and who spoke at the forum in Newport Beach. "In the United States, we don't have the firm data we need to understand it."

Organized by the decade-old International Commission on Occupational Health, the forum was dominated by talk about the need for bigger, more imaginative research projects and for hard data on the long-term economic benefits of stress reduction. "You need numbers to show that your field is important," Kristensen said.

In this work, however, there is one recurring problem: Stress is a subjective term that doesn't lend itself to hard numbers, especially when comparing across cultures and social classes.

For years, occupational health researchers have struggled to come up with formulas for measuring job stress and determining its effect on health. One model balances high work demands with decision-making latitude, which softens the stress. In another, job pressures are mitigated by a sense of fairness and social support on the job.

At the occupational health forum, the first steps were taken toward crafting a model that reflects changes such as the shift toward temporary and contract work arrangements.

Even updated, however, the measures are likely to draw scepticism. The trends they seek to measure are so broad that many other factors could influence the health outcomes. Is the problem stress or an ageing workforce? Are there other societal changes that play a role?

"Some things are un-settle-able," said Ben Ansell, a UCLA internist who co-directs the UCLA Cholesterol, Hypertension and Atherosclerosis Management Program. "In the Western world we're very quantitative, and this is a non-quantitative area."

Ansell, who was not part of the forum, said research and treatment has tended to focus on diet, exercise and smoking for good reason: They lend themselves to controlled studies and measurable interventions.

That's not to say he disputes the link between stress and disease. Ansell said he's seen the evidence himself in executives he monitors through the UCLA program.

About half of them show dangerously high blood sugar levels. "I believe this is a real issue," he said. "But cholesterol is a bad thing too, and that's much easier to explain to people."

### The cost to business and economy

The emphasis might change if employer costs continue to rise for heart disease and other stress-related ailments. Already, several major U.S. employers have created stress-reduction programs that go beyond lunchtime yoga, and disability insurers are starting to show interest in the topic.

ORC Worldwide, a Washington-based consulting firm that provides human relations services to major multinational corporations, has urged its clients for years to take stress seriously, pointing out that the problem cuts into productivity and profits, said counsellor Joanne Linhard.

According to its website, ORC also has lobbied the U.S. government to be more aggressive in setting a public policy and research agenda on work stress, rather than allowing it to be defined by European governments and labour groups.

John Howard, the director of NIOSH, said work stress is "one of our most fertile areas of research" but added that it hasn't gotten the attention it deserves. "Sometimes employers don't understand that workers are their real asset, especially in a service economy," he said. "If we're going to keep improving productivity, we have to make sure that we keep workers healthy."

### **Swedish Research links Diabetes to Work-related Stress in Women**

Women who experience stress and a lack of control over their situation at work risk developing diabetes, a Swedish researcher said on Monday.

"We have discovered a link between stress, at work and the development of type 2 diabetes in women," said researcher Emilie Agardh at the Karolinska Institute in Stockholm.

She has based her research on data collected from about 5,000 men between 1992 and 1994 and from some 3,000 women between 1996 and 1998. The subjects were asked to answer questions about their work conditions, their relationships to colleagues, their education, diet and exercise. Approximately 450 of the men and women studied suffered from type 2 diabetes and especially many of the women suffering from the illness said they felt they had little control at work, according to Agardh.

"We have only found the link between a lack of control at work and diabetes in women. I can't yet explain why this link exists for women and not men. More research is needed," she said.

## **Stress Snippets**

### **Stressed Doctor Dies**

A village doctor killed himself after being put under pressure to cut the number of patients he referred to hospital, an inquest has heard.

Dr Stephen Farley, of Ibstock House Surgery, Ibstock, Leics, was found hanged in January 2004.

Charnwood and North West Leics Primary Care Trust investigated Dr Farley, 55, for sending too many of his patients to see hospital specialists.

The inquest at Loughborough Magistrates Court on Thursday heard that Dr Farley had found the investigation "extremely stressful", causing him to take time off work and see a psychiatrist.

North Leics coroner Trevor Kirkman recorded a verdict of suicide.

### **Personal Problems Affect Work**

Workers spend up to one day a week trying to cope with personal problems, a survey suggests. Problems reported range from the serious - such as bereavement - to more routine ones such as childcare.

Human resources consultancy PPC Worldwide said it estimated lost productivity from workers' problems cost UK business £15bn in 2004. The consultancy added that UK firms needed to improve relationships at work to cut problem-related absenteeism.

### **Computer Stress**

Keeping computer viruses at bay is more stressful than divorce, warns a survey. The research revealed how European technology bosses were coping with the growing number of hi-tech threats. Although many firms had software in place to combat viruses, spam and phishing, it found few adequately protected against all threats.

The survey also revealed that many tech bosses would face dismissal if they let their firm fall victim to a serious security breach.

### Laugh your way to health

Watching a funny film boosts the way blood vessels function, a study says. Researchers from the University of Maryland School of Medicine in Baltimore compared the effects of watching funny and stressful films. Stress caused blood flow to slow by around 35%, but laughter increased it by around 22%, they told the American College of Cardiology. UK heart experts said there was increasing interest in the idea that positive emotions benefited health.

### Teachers get lesson in how to beat stress

STRESSED staff at Longbarn Community Primary School enjoyed an evening of pampering and relaxation last week. Over the past few months, the future of the school has been uncertain and the threat of closure has put extra strain on teachers.

As a result, Helen Farrow, a beauty and holistic therapy lecturer from Warrington Collegiate spent an evening at the school, helping staff to unwind. A salon environment was created in the school hall using chill out spa music, relaxed lighting, aromatherapy candles and a backdrop of a mural of safari animals.

Nine members of the primary school staff underwent a variety of treatments, including manicure, a foot soak and massage followed by a pedicure and a seated back, neck and shoulder massage.

### IOD Welcomes Sick Leave Reforms

A much greater emphasis on rehabilitation for employees on long-term sick leave is needed, the Institute of Directors said yesterday.

Responding to the Government's announcement on reform of the Incapacity Benefit system, Alyson Howard, Chairman of the Kent branch of the Institute of Directors, said: "The fact that so many people who actually want to engage in employment, but for one reason or another have not been able to, means that action is needed. This would not only benefit individuals, but also business and the economy as a whole."

### Stop Workplace Bullying says CIPD

Whilst many employers have anti-bullying policies, research shows bullying in the workplace still happens says the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) The research shows that a majority of employers (83%) have an anti-bullying policy in place. However, managing conflict at work, which includes bullying, costs the average employer nearly 450 days of management time each year, along with additional costs such as lost productivity, sickness absence and higher employee turnover.

The CIPD have launched a new guide to help employers tackle bullying and undesirable behaviour in the workplace: 'Tackling bullying at work'

The Guide encourages employers to take a new approach to the way they deal with bullying:

"Employers should work with staff to create a 'dignity at work policy' that defines the positive behaviour expected from all employees. This will help ensure staff know what is expected from them and it will be easier to identify when someone is acting unreasonably. The next step is to provide training to all line managers and team leaders to help them recognise the signs of bullying or undesirable behaviour, taking action to encourage people to recognise and change their behaviour before situations escalate.

"There is a very fine line between firm autocratic management and bullying. Being clear about the difference between using reasonable management techniques and bullying at work will help managers who are concerned about being accused of bullying.

"Training line managers will help change mindsets making it easier to move away from the traditional boss versus employee scenario. Gaining commitment and trust will help reduce conflict within the workplace, deliver benefits to the business by improving performance, improve the working environment and help retain staff."